



Put Layaway Surprises on Hold by Reading Fine Print

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MADISON – Layaway is a popular option for consumers looking to hold the hottest gifts at the store without paying the full price upfront. The process for layaway varies from store to store, however, with different fees and conditions to consider. To avoid layaway surprises, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) asks shoppers to read and understand each store's respective policies before they make an initial down payment.

“Remember that some stores require a setup fee to lock down an item and you may also pay an additional fee if you have to cancel the layaway,” said Frank Frassetto, Division Administrator for Trade and Consumer Protection. “Before you sign any agreements or make a setup payment, review the store's layaway documentation and weigh the value of having the item against any risks you may face.”

Some stores offer consumers the opportunity to shop at the store for their items and make the layaway payments online, but online layaway may have different terms from those in the store. For example, physical stores may require you to make incremental payments within certain monthly timeframes, but the online layaway terms may require scheduled withdrawals from your checking account or through a third-party payment service. Read the fine print on the website closely and call the company's customer service line if you have any questions before you make a down payment.

DATCP offers the following tips to help research a layaway program:

Layaway terms:

- Find out how much time you have to make all of the required payments, when the payments are due and the minimum payment required.
- Ask about service or setup fees.
- Ask what happens to the contract if you are late or miss a payment. Are there penalty fees? Will your contract be cancelled? Will the merchandise be returned to inventory?

Refund policies:

- If you decide you don't want the merchandise after you've made some or all the payments, can you get a refund? Ask upfront.
- Retailers' policies may differ: some give you all your money back; others may charge a non-refundable service fee; others may offer a merchant credit for the amount you paid.

Get the merchant's layaway policy in writing and keep receipts of the payments you make on the merchandise. These documents may come in handy if you have a problem with the seller.

For additional information or to file a complaint, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at datcp.wisconsin.gov, call the Consumer Information Hotline at 800-422-7128 or send an e-mail to datcphotline@wisconsin.gov.

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